

Law Schools React to U.S. News Rankings Shake-Up with Heightened Analysis



The U.S. News & World Report rankings, one of the world's most widely followed higher education rankings, will be officially released on April 18. However, with the publication date coming weeks after the deposit deadlines for many top law schools, law schools are keen to determine their rankings in advance.

This year's ranking cycle is incredibly unpredictable because of a methodology overhaul and the unusually late publication date. Consequently, several pundits are predicting how the rankings will shake out.

The "T-14" top 14 law schools are expected to remain unchanged. However, some more significant shifts outside the elite schools are expected, according to several projections.

Law school consultant Mike Spivey, who has assigned each law school a median score based on the outcomes of 15 different rankings scenarios, says that "the results aren't that different from the rankings last year." Similarly, University of Iowa law professor Derek Muller, who ran law schools' data through five possible rankings methodologies, notes that "the shakeup, for most schools, may not be nearly as dramatic as one may suppose."

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This year's ranking will rely solely on data publicly available through the American Bar Association and reputational survey scores collected by U.S. News. Internal data provided by law schools, such as graduate employment at graduation and expenditures per student, will not be included. This change has made it easier for outsiders to generate rankings predictions. However, they have had to guess how much U.S. News will weigh each ABA data point, such as bar pass rates, median LSAT scores and grade-point averages, and student-to-faculty ratios.

U.S. News said in January that it would overhaul its law school ranking and base them primarily on ABA data after nearly a quarter of U.S. schools said they would no longer provide internal data. The growing backlash against U.S. News' higher education rankings was sparked by Yale Law School in November. Yale criticized the rankings for hurting student diversity and affordability.

While Yale led the charge against U.S. News, it is unlikely to pay the price for the revolt. Muller and Spivey concluded that Yale is likely to maintain its position at No. 1—a spot it has held for over 30 years.

In conclusion, the upcoming U.S. News & World Report rankings are causing a lot of speculation among law schools and ranking watchers. The methodology overhaul and late publication date have added to the unpredictability of the rankings. However, the T-14 law schools are expected to remain relatively stable, and any changes outside the elite schools are unlikely to be dramatic. The absence of internal data has made it easier for outsiders to predict the rankings, but they still have to guess how much U.S. News will weight each ABA data point. Yale Law School's criticism of U.S. News' higher education rankings is unlikely to impact its position at the top of the law school rankings.